

CREATING A PRODUCTIVITY CULTURE

BY ERIC P. BLOOM

Boosting productivity in the workplace is a matter of doing more with what you've got.

WHAT DOES PRODUCTIVITY MEAN TO YOU?

To many, it means more time, money and resources to get other things done. For example, if you have five people working toward the completion of a specified task and can find a way to complete it using only four people, you can have the fifth person working on something else. Productivity is the art of doing more with the time, money and resources you have at your disposal.

Make no mistake: Productivity requires change. If your organization views the ability to change as an important business attribute, then ongoing productivity improvement can be the status quo. If your company is set in its ways, refuses to streamline its processes and shuns innovation, then productivity improvement is not required. Given

today's business environment, a company that does not progress will soon stagger under its own weight and fade away. That said, if you are working at or own this type of firm, the best way for you to be productive is by updating your résumé. Conversely, an internal productivity culture that continually strives for optimal efficiency gives your organization the opportunity to enhance its market position, maximize its profits, increase its market share and position itself for future growth and success.

There are six cultural attributes needed to give your organization the ability to accept the small, and sometimes large, changes that productivity enhancements require.

1. Cultural Awareness. One of the most important business attributes of people leading the productivity charge is cultural awareness. This is the ability to understand your organization's internal politics, idiosyncrasies, strengths, and weaknesses and how it gets things done. To make matters more complicated, organizations have multiple cultures called subcultures. For example the help desk may have a different internal culture than software development.

Before moving forward with a productivity initiative, you must first ask yourself the question: "Does this organizational change require cultural change first?" The answer may be yes or it may be no; it will depend if the changes being made are aligned and consistent with the current organizational culture.

2. Innovative Mindset. Innovative opportunities to enhance productivity come in many forms. They could be the successful creation, implementation, reuse and/or improvement of an existing business process that reduces costs, enhances productivity, increases company competitiveness or provides other business value.

Finding these innovative solutions requires a willingness to look at your existing operational processes with a critical eye—even if you were the one who originally designed them. Albert Einstein once said, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." That is to say, you must think about your processes from different perspectives if you wish to improve them.

3. Management Focus. Like all organizational initiatives, productivity related projects must have management support. If not, they most likely will not get funded. If they do get funded, they will eventually wither on the vine. If you're the project's executive champion, great! If not, you must find one that can provide you with the resources and political clout needed to move your productivity innovation from idea to ongoing business practice.

4. Employee Communication. Virtually all productivity enhancements are a form of change, and this change must be communicated to those affected by it in the following way:

- Be clear in your own mind about what you want to say.
- Be consistent over time in your messaging.
- Be aware that varying audiences have different needs and worries.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, people are **not against you**; rather, they are **for themselves**.

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business issues

- ▶ Explain rationale in such a way that listeners can best relate to the issue.
- ▶ People are persuaded more by human dimension than statistical facts.
- ▶ Showing your genuine passion and enthusiasm has the potential to create similar feelings in your listeners.

5. Self and Organizational Learning. Organizational learning is born through a combination of formalized education and business experience, both of which are driven (or suppressed) by the organization's internal culture. Different employees need different types of training in order to grow. Designers need to learn new technologies and practices. Senior executives need to keep abreast of industry trends and corporate best practices. Lastly, all employees need to maximize their interpersonal skills, business skills and emotional intelligence. These skills collectively help employees of all levels to not only identify organizational efficiencies, but also provide the business savvy to make it a reality.

Professional curiosity in both individuals and organizations cause them to be introspective and more aware of their external environment. Introspection causes people to ask, "How can I improve?" External awareness causes people to ask, "What can I learn from my surroundings that can help me and/or my company successfully move forward?" Both of these questions lead to innovative thought and help drive productivity.

6. Conflict Avoidance and Resolution. Productivity drives change and change drives conflict. The ability to minimize this conflict helps facilitate change, which in turn drives productivity. Your personal and organizational ability to deal effectively with conflict can make or break your ability to enhance organizational productivity.

A good thing to remember if your project is being slowed or stopped by a specific individual is that 99% of the time, people are not against you but rather are for themselves. This means that if you can understand the reason behind someone's objections, you can very often turn a presumed adversary into an ally.

When you gain an understanding of your company's internal culture with respect to these six cultural attributes, you can enhance your entire organization's productivity. With this knowledge in hand, analyze the impact these factors are having on your organization's ability to foster innovation, communicate internally, expand corporate knowledge and implement change. Lastly, where appropriate, devise a plan to slowly move toward a true productivity culture. This culture, in turn, will be your steppingstone toward continuous improvement and the full use of the time, money and resources required to make your organization grow and prosper. ■